

**State of Michigan  
Office of the State Employer**

**EMPLOYEE SERVICE PROGRAM**

P.O. Box 30669  
Lansing, MI 48909  
1-800-521-1377  
517-373-7630

## **Supervising an Employee with Suicidal Concerns**

Suicide is a significant cause of death among Americans, and government personnel are not exempt from the problem. Though there are differences in suicide rates based on such factors as age, gender, and ethnicity, a person from any background can commit suicide, or go through a period of seriously contemplating it.

People considering suicide often have been “worn down” by many stresses and problems. Actual or expected loss, especially a love relationship, is often a contributing factor. The suicidal person is frequently lonely and without a solid support system. Sometimes this is a long-term characteristic of the person; in other cases a geographic move, death, or a divorce may deprive an individual of personal ties that were formerly supportive.

Listen carefully to what your employees say—people thinking about suicide often give hints about their intentions. Talking about not being present in the future, giving away prized possessions, and making funeral plans are examples of possible hints of suicidal intent. If you hear such talk, question it, kindly but firmly. You won’t make the situation worse by clarifying it, and an open conversation with you may be the person’s first step toward getting well.

Be alert to changes in behavior. A deterioration in job performance, personal appearance, punctuality, or other habits can be a sign of many problems, including suicidal concerns.

### **If an employee admits thinking about suicide:**

You’ll want to get your employee to professional help, and the way you do this is very important. The way you approach the issue can have an impact on the employee’s willingness to receive professional help. Your respect and concern for the employee can contribute to the healing process.

- First offer your own personal concern and support. Let the person know you care—the employee is both a unique human being and a valued member of your team.
- Show understanding of the employee’s pain and despair, but offer hope that, with appropriate help, solutions can be found for the problems that are leading the person to feel so desperate.
- Ask whether any of the employee’s concerns are work related, and if so, take initiative in addressing those problems. For example, the employee may feel improperly trained for key responsibilities, or may be having difficulties with leave or some similar issue without having made you aware of it.

- Do not question the employee about personal problems, as the individual may wish to keep them out of the workplace, but listen with empathy if the employee chooses to share them.
- Do not offer advice, but acknowledge that the problems are real and painful.
- Consult with your department Human Resource Office when appropriate.
- Protect the employee's privacy with regard to other employees. This will require thought and planning, as questions are sure to arise.
- Without hovering over the employee, show your continued support and interest, and make it clear that the individual is an important part of the team.

### **SEEK ASSISTANCE**

The State of Michigan Employee Service Program has professional counselors available to consult with supervisors and managers, as well as to provide individual assistance to employees. The program is free of charge to state employees and their family members, and can be reached Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

CALL: 517-373-7630 OR 1-800-521-1377 IN LANSING OR 313-456-4020 IN DETROIT.

The National HopeLine Network is available 24 hours 7 days a week at 800-SUICIDE [for TTY call 800-448-1833]. In the event of a life-threatening emergency, you should go immediately to the nearest emergency room. Your local police can be contacted at 911 for assistance if needed.

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